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THE CAREER OF WILHELM FENNER

WITH

SPECIAL REGARD TO HIS ACTIVITY IN THE FIELD OF

CRYPTOGRAPHY AND CRYPTANALYSIS

1. During his period of detention (September-December 1946) at the Hq 7707 European Command Intelligence Center, Oberursel, Germany Wilhelm FENNER, former Ministerialrat and chief of cryptanalysis in the Armed Forces High Command Cryptologic Agency (OKW/Chi), wrote a lengthy report concerning his past career and his extensive experiences in the field of cryptology. This report was never issued in translation, although an inadequate summary by Army Security Agency was issued as TICOM/I-206.

2. It is presently planned to issue a complete translation of the entire report in the DF Series. The attached translation is the first of the series and is FENNER's description of his career.

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THE CAREER OF WILHELM FETTER WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO HIS ACTIVITY IN THE FIELD OF CRYPTOGRAPHY AND CRYPTANALYSIS

Birth I was born as the sixth and next to the last child of the second marriage of my father Heinrich Gottlieb FETTER with Charlotte Georgine MICHAELSEN on 14.4.1891 in St. Petersburg and was baptized and confirmed in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. My father was managing editor (anordnender Redakteur) of the "St. Petersburger Zeitung".

School After two years of instruction at home I entered in the autumn of 1899 the Evangelical Lutheran Main School of St. Anne, attended its classical gymnasium and in May 1909 passed my comprehensive examination (Abiturientenexamen) with distinction. After that I spent one year as private tutor in the house of Countess HEYDEN, nee Princess DOLGUKOFF-KOSSAKOFF, and in the house of her daughter, Mrs. WOLKOFF, nee Countess HEYDEN.

Study In the autumn of 1910 I matriculated at the Royal Institute of Technology in Berlin-Charlottenburg and attended lectures on construction engineering. I also attended lectures on chemistry, public hygiene, and the then young science of metallography. I was a member of the non-dueling Christian Fraternity "Wingolf". In the summer of 1914 I passed the preliminary examination for the degree /Kandidatenexamen/.

World War I In consequence of the outbreak of World War I, I received no more money from my mother and became an engineer with Siemens (electric follow-the-pointer equipment on warships) and waited to be called up for the First Guard Railway Regiment. On 1.12.1914, however, I was called up for Grenadier Regiment 5, because after the heavy losses before Warsaw this regiment needed many replacements. At Christmas 1914 I was transferred to Munich where a mountain unit - the later Alpine Corps - was being set up. After employment at the front in Russia, Tyrol, France, and Serbia I was transferred in December 1915 to the higher command of the 10th Army as Russian

staffs. I was commissioned Lieutenant 21.1.1917. Even after the collapse (9 November 1918) I remained in the Army, first with a volunteer battalion, then with the staff of a volunteer reserve corps.

Publicity man

On 9.2.1920 I was discharged and took a position as publicity man (Pressereferent) with the "Emigre Aid" Organization (Verein "Rueckwandererhilfe"). I had little to do and the German Press did not like to accept my short propaganda articles. In the spring of 1921 I was offered an editor's job in a press agency to be founded by the former Colonel of the Imperial Russian Staff, Konstantin von KRUSENSTERN. I accepted the offer but nothing came of the enterprise because von KRUSENSTERN got into financial difficulties and went to Paris. Through von KRUSENSTERN I had become acquainted with the former Imperial Russian Naval Captain and Professor of Applied Tactics, Peter NOVOPASCHENNY. He asked me to help him contact the German General Staff because he (NOVOPASCHENNY) intended to settle in Berlin. NOVOPASCHENNY told me that during the war he had been director of the Russian cryptanalytic service against the German Baltic Fleet; that he had worked successfully and would place his experience at the disposition of the German General Staff because he had been urged to do so by the Russian Admiral, KOLTSCHAK.

Cryptologic Bureau Buschenhagen

I made contact and in so doing became acquainted with the Director of the Cryptologic Bureau, Oberleutnant BUSCHENHAGEN (now Generalleutnant in Russian captivity), and began working on Russian telegrams which BUSCHENHAGEN brought along (autumn of 1921). These were telegrams to and from "PETROFF", the Russian Military Attache in Berlin.

Cryptanalysis 1921

Historical truth requires that I state here that at that time I had not the faintest idea of cryptography. In this regard NOVOPASCHENNY was my teacher and master in all things. We worked d[illegible]ontly, often till far into the night and after some weeks were successful:

Now BUSCHENHAGEN decided to trust us and turned over to us the entire Russian Section which at that time consisted of four persons. Since BUSCHENHAGEN was camouflaging his position, we worked in the private dwelling of Professor NOVOPASCHENNY. Our collaboration with the new colleagues showed one thing quite clearly: these people knew nothing about systematic work; the concept of analytic thinking was completely foreign to them. If that was the spirit of the other cryptanalysts, whom we assumed to exist but of whom we knew nothing, then the entire organization needed to be reformed.

Systematic treatment of Cryptographic Systems

In this period (winter and spring 1921/1922) fell the first attempts of Professor NOVOPASCHENNY to deal with cryptographic systems in a systematic way. Since NOVOPASCHENNY could express himself but poorly in German, it was my task to translate all his ideas into German. In this connection I found out that not even the technical language of the German cryptanalyst was correct and free from contradiction. I thereupon created this technical language.

Technical Language Results

During these months we solved many Russian cryptograms, put our terminology in order, and brought clarity into the concepts of cryptology.

Director of Chi 1922

In the autumn of 1922 NOVOPASCHENNY and I were officially taken over as employees of the Cryptologic Bureau. At this time the direction of the Section "Cryptanalysis", which then consisted of 11 persons, was entrusted to me. The burden of responsibility weighed heavily on me since I still understood very little about cryptanalysis and aside from very primitive Russian Army cryptographic systems had learned as yet but one thing: not from embarrassment to undertake any sundry attempts, but to make plain statistical studies the basis of every solution, and above all to exer[illegible] self-critic during the work

Chi 1922 At that time my section consisted of the following persons:

Angst[1]	Hellmuth MUELLER	worked on France
"	Nikolai ROHEN	worked on England
"	Carl WAECHTER	worked on England
"	Emil Freiherr[2] von REZNICZEK	worked on Italy
"	Alfred FUCHS	statistician
"	NOVOPASCHENNY	worked on Russian Army cryptograms
"	FENNER	"
"	Alfonso KLEIBERT	"
"	Oblt. a. D.[3] SCHMIDT	"
"	Dr. Felix SCHERKE	"
"	Frl[4] Edith von BUECHLER	"

In the case of France, England and Italy a "plain" code was worked on, i. e., one without reencipherment (French = surchiffrement).

My new colleagues worked with a vague concept of "genius" (genialitaet). They were content if three or four diplomatic messages were decoded daily. In the case of French messages, generally 4-digit plain codes, one was always aided by the fact that the daily press published compromises of the telegrams.

Primitive Cryptographic Systems

In short, cryptanalysis (cryptology) was still in its infancy; encipherment (cryptography) was still exactly as naive. It was just as if a period of weariness had descended upon all peoples after the war; during the war they had, at least in part, used far more complicated cryptographic systems! My colleagues, however, did not consider it necessary to learn from what others had already thought and done.

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1. Angestellter (Employee)
2. Baron
3. Oberleutnant ausser Dienst (First Lieutenant, Retired)
4. Fraeulein (Miss)

Old Cryptanalytic Reports and Literature

In a spirit of protest I did two things: (1) I worked through all (still preserved) reports of German cryptanalysis during the World War - especially from Grand Headquarters, and (2) I went through all accessible literature with the support of the German Army library.

Cryptographic Formulae

The result of this task, which took over a year, was an enormous stimulation of my fancy; a knowledge of what had been; a sharpening of my critical judgment and the creation of a short unique designation for every cryptographic system, somewhat after the manner of a chemical formula. I must not fail to stress the fact that in all this I enjoyed the shrewd counsel of Professor NOVOPASCHENNY. These formulae were introduced and in the course of years were officially accepted for cryptologic agencies in Vienna, Budapest, Helsingfors, and Rome. Even Sofia thought of introducing these formulae in 1944.

Lectures, analytic thinking

By lectures in cryptanalytic circles the workers were accustomed to strict systematic methods; moreover, I worked out with Professor NOVOPASCHENNY special problems, each with the pedagogic aim of encouraging the cryptanalyst to think analytically.

This disciplining of the spirit did not remain without results. The word "Genialitaet" was banned; training and tested experience came into the foreground. I studied other cryptograms which had never been worked on, found that the underlying principle could not be complex, and had them worked on from a philological angle. This necessarily led to an enlargement of my office.

Poland Roumania

As a new field of endeavor Poland (army and air systems) was added and soon thereafter Roumania. With this state of things it was impossible for me to work only from time to time on actual cryptanalytic

Criticism The output of decrypted messages increased, at that time they passed through my hands. I checked the wording of the translation and criticized anything which appeared to me to be incorrect.

Cablegrams With this extension of my activity, the need of radiograms was also increasing. It had long since been proven that radiograms alone leave too great gaps in the collection of traffic. But to get cablegrams from the Post Office Department (Reichspost) was difficult, since the democratic regime refused to turn over such dispatches to the Ministry of Defense (Reichswehrministerium). As director of the cryptanalysis section I had to concern myself also with matters which are really the task of "interception". The Foreign Office (Das Auswaertige Amt) became mistrustful. It asserted that decryptment of diplomatic messages did not concern soldiers. I fought it out and proved that the diplomats are always talking about military matters in their telegrams! I got the cablegrams from the main telegraph office. The daily output of decrypted messages rose to 20 - 25.

Instruction New people were engaged, they had to be instructed. I gave the instruction. At such times I merely "hovered" over the cryptanalytic work.

Buschenhagen Kabina An unsuccessful advance by my superior, Oberleutnant BUSCHENHAGEN, in Vienna had as a result the appearance in the autumn of 1923 of the Royal Hungarian Colonel KABINA in Berlin who as Chief of the Hungarian cryptanalytic unit suggested collaboration.

Ministerialrat Dr. Klob About a year later Ministerialrat Hofrat[5] Dr. KLOB from the Balkansplatz in Vienna appeared on a similar mission. In both cases the contact was accepted. An exchange of telegrams and solved code groups was the result.

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5 [illegible] Government Councillor, Privy Councillor

Useful Connections — These two connections proved useful, because Vienna in particular with its great experience and traditional ability greatly furthered my work.

Extension of my field — So my day from morning till evening was abundantly filled with work; but I was administering and guiding and was no longer active in the field of cryptanalysis. Meanwhile the work on Polish Government messages had been successfully begun. Roumania was being read; likewise Czech Army systems, and one American system (USA). My personnel had risen to some 30 persons.

Regierungsrat — On 1.4.1927, after not quite six years of service, I became a so-called Dietar/Regierungsrat[6] (candidate for an official position).

Helsingfors — An advance by my director (Rudolf SCHMIDT[7] Major in the General Staff) in Helsingfors led in June 1927 to my being detailed there: Helsingfors was on the point of organizing a cryptanalytic unit.

Course of Instruction — I delivered before the few gentlemen of this unit (three persons) a course of lectures on the fundamentals of cryptanalysis (cryptology).

Foreign Cryptanalysis — On the basis of publications in the foreign press and in military literature I wrote somewhat later a critical study of cryptanalysis in foreign countries. This work attracted little attention; the statement that the British chief cryptanalyst was materially far better off than the Bishop of Canterbury did not please people at all

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6. [illegible]vernment Counc[illegible]lor
7. [illegible]

and was deleted. Nevertheless, the work did have some success: I no longer had to fight for every new appointment and for improving our interception of messages.

"Basis of Cryptanalysis" Somewhat later I wrote the "Basis of Cryptanalysis" ("Grundlagen der Entzifferung") for the instruction of officers. This little work had great success: I intentionally kept it as uncomplicated as possible!

The gradually increasing unemployment, the constant changes of government in Berlin and in the German states despite the apparent economic prosperity under the Stresemann Government brought repeated crises which stimulated the reporting of foreign diplomats. So we had plenty to do at that time. Three times I had occasion to work on problems in very close contact with Professor NOVOPASCHENNY, problems which were essentially quite new:

Reencipherments Poland, Italy France

1. The Poles had begun some years earlier to use short digit sequences for the reencipherment of diplomatic messages; now the problem of reencipherment by means of long but finite digit sequences had to be solved.

2. The Italians began reenciphering their 5-digit codes with pairs of letters, so-called digraphic substitution tables.

3. The French used a system in which certain pairs of digits of the 4-place code were replaced by other pairs of digits.

The Polish and French systems were solved without "compromise". But in the case of the Italians, when with Professor NOVOPASCHENNY I had just reached the point where we could present approximately 80% of a digraphic substitution table, "Esteri roma" exposed the system completely: It had reenciphered a text once and sent it another time in plain code!

Theory of slides

On the basis of my studies of this problem I wrote my work "Contribution to the Theory of Slides" ("Beitrag zur Theorie der Schieben"), i. e., a cryptologic study of a mathematical group theory.

Enigma

Moreover, I had already carried out the computation of the Army Enigma, indicated the possibility of solution and made suggestions for the necessary improvement - a study in the field of combinatorial analysis (Kombinatorik).

The greatly increased personnel of my unit and the daily volume of decrypted messages tied me closely to guidance and administration, interrupted only by occasional journeys to Vienna and Budapest.

Forschungsamt

In the spring of 1933 - after the "assumption of power" - the Forschungsamt was founded as a private intelligence organization of Hermann GOERING. He attracted a number of persons who feared they would not get ahead fast enough in the Cryptologic Bureau, among them the two excellent cryptanalysts Baron von KAMINSKY and Herr WACHTER.

Restless times 1933/1934

The resulting gaps were filled, to be sure, by transfers from out-stations and new appointments but the restless times were not favorable for scientific cryptanalysis. It is true, I was still in a position to hire as a rule people who had not left the Church and were not in the NSDAP, but a certain letting down of what we may term "attitude" ("Haltung") was making itself manifest. At the same time the period called for putting forth every effort. I decided, therefore, to give all talented cryptanalysts of the younger classes a thorough training.

One-sided practical work

Practical work had proven to me that under some circumstances it may make one one-sided, e. g., in the case of Roumania where the same cryptographic systems were used year in and year out. What I

had already done years before with a small group in 90 days, I now repeated on a larger scale in two winter semesters in each case with a "Course in Low Level Cryptology" with lectures and problems covering all "basic systems" (these are cryptographic systems involving a single operation) and systems with a single reencipherment. The instruction was given three times a week from 1500 to 1700 hours and was discontinued only after my office building was destroyed in consequence of mass air attacks on Berlin (autumn 1943) and I could find no suitable classroom.

In the summer of 1933 I became Oberregierungsrat[8] (possibly not till 1934).

Career of cryptanalysts

As the result of occasional personnel crises and of my feeling of responsibility for the interests of my loyal co-workers, I had conceived a plan back in the late 20's of setting up a special career for cryptanalysts as high-level officials of the Armed Forces (hoehere Wehrmachtbeamte). I now took up the idea again and sketched the basic regulations, including regulations governing examinations. Before the ministries involved had expressed their opinion on the subject, many months passed but in 1938/1939 KEITEL signed the necessary orders and I now had the assurance that the training of a new cryptanalytic generation lay firmly in my hands and I could now really guarantee suitable people a secure future and could place unsuitable ones at the disposal of others.

Better foreign cryptographic systems

Furthermore, the cryptographic systems of all civilized countries had become more resistant in the course of time and it was clear to me that these difficult assignments could only be solved by people who had natural ability and had received substantial training - but who should then also have a claim to old age pensions as officials.

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8. of Governmer Councillor

Spring 1938

At the time of the occupation of Czechoslovakia I was in Prague.

In a friendly conversation with the head of the Czech military cryptanalytic section, Lieutenant Colonel FUZEK, which lasted for hours, we exchanged our ideas regarding cryptography and cryptology. In so doing I got confirmation of the fact that a regular training is the essential guarantee of a successful crypteralytic section - and FUZEK was considered at the Cryptologic Bureau a first-class research man and very able!

Ministerialrat

In the summer of 1938 I had become Ministerialrat.[9]

Responsibility of the sections

Meanwhile the practical work of cryptanalysis in my unit had long since assumed such proportions that I could no longer concern myself at all with details. Responsibility for daily "current" decipherment was borne solely by the section head to whom I intentionally gave as much freedom and independence as possible. I still intervened if disturbances arose or when special working groups, so-called "shock troops", had to be formed to attack some new reencipherment.

Hagelin cipher machines

The total level of my office had also been raised considerably so that I was quite unconcerned regarding the developments of the next few years, - even though the gigantic problem of completely mechanical encipherment by means of modern devices, e. g., Hagelin, was slowly moving into the foreground on the cryptographic stage! Consequently I was familiarizing myself with the idea of gathering the most competent cryptanalysts for a special course in advanced cryptology when the proper opportunity came.

Army, Air, Navy, have own cryptanalytic units

Our connections abroad were working out well. The decryption of the radiograms of foreign armies I had had to turn over abc 937/1938 to th ryptanalytic unit of the Army. BRAUCHITSCH had asked

an inferior system. Since all these reproaches were false and were due solely to the ambition of a fanatical Party member, this did not upset my position.

Projected (national) Cryptanalytic Agency

On the contrary, SS-Brigadefuehrer[11] SCHELLENBERG (now in Nuernberg) and the Chief of the Armed Forces Signal Communications (Chef Wehrmachtnachrichtenverbindungen) Generalleutnant THUELE (hanged for participation on 20.7.1944) turned to me in the matter of organizing a single cryptanalytic agency with the aim of taking the best cryptanalysts from the Cryptologic Bureau, from the cryptanalytic units of the Army, Air Force, and Navy and from the Foreign Office and of placing this new agency under my guidance, but of dissolving the Forschungsamt "just as sure as the Amen follows the Our Father". This did not come about.

Dissolution of Chi 14.4.1945

At the end of 1944 working conditions in Berlin had become so impossible that Chi was transferred on 13.2.1945 to the Army Signal School in Halle/Saale. There I was able to resume decipherment on a limited scale, since I already lacked regular traffic receipts, but military events forced the Cryptologic Agency to leave Halle too. After dismissing all employees who wanted to go home, Chi traveled in a military train on 13.4.1945 to Werfen on the Salzach in Austria. On 14.4.1945 I was transferred with all personnel to the General der Nachrichtenaufklaerung Sued.[12] On the same day Chi OKW ceased to exist. In anticipation of the entry of the American Ninth (?) Army all material was destroyed by fire or thrown into the Salzach.

Capitulation

On 8.5.1945 came the official capitulation. All the personnel were on their own.

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11 Brigadier General of the Elite Guard

12 That part of the Army High Command Cryptologic Agency (General der Nachrichtenaufklaerung) which had been moved to the southern part of Germany

Output reduced due to air attacks on Berlin

Not until the end of November 1943 when the office buildings were so damaged that the analysts were compelled to work in the cold and without adequate rest at night, squeezed together as closely as possible, and finally disturbed by regular day attacks, did the output sometimes sink to 25 - 30 percent.

Cryptanalytic devices

The development of the mechanical cryptanalytic aids mentioned elsewhere fell precisely in the war years. Although good work was done with them under some circumstances, they were actually only experimental models. I set up the problems, but I did not have time to concern myself with details of construction. The real high-water mark of technique had not yet been achieved. Practical experiments, however, did show one thing: any mechanical scanning of perforated tapes was always much too slow; the future belongs to the photo-electric scanning of the elements of the secret text to be subjected to statistical study.

Cryptanalysis

At the same time the analytic section was greatly developed; in fact, it formed in a way the focal point of my unit, because this tricky field must become the foundation of later successes against foreign cryptographic systems which would presumably become more and more difficult.

Course in advanced cryptology

To train the best analysts a "Course in Advanced Cryptology" was instituted (1943/1944) under the direction of Regierungsrat Dr. HUETTENHAIN.

In the next period (1944/1945) fell the last disagreeable attacks on my person: an accusation of having derided the Storm Troops (Sturmabteilungen SA) years ago; a suspicion of being implicated in the events of 20.7.1944;[10] an

usation of sabotaging German Army cryptographic systems by recommending

for that. The Air Force had likewise set up a cryptanalytic unit of its own, ostensibly at the request of GOERING whose Forschungsamt strangely enough was not concerned with precisely these tasks. The Navy likewise had a cryptographic unit of its own, and so at the beginning of the war, as head of Group IV of the Cryptologic Bureau of OKW, I was actually charged only with the decryption of political cryptograms. In regard to the Russian Army, however, I acted against orders for I knew that the cryptanalytic unit of the German Army was not yet sufficiently well trained to work wholly independently. The same thing was true of the Air Force.

My tolerated disobedience

At the beginning of the war my disobedience paid off:

I had to detail my people to aid the cryptanalytic unit of the Air Force; I was called in to assist with work on a French Army system, and had to participate in the solution of Russian Army systems.

Captured Material

When the first successes against Poland, France, Russia, and Yugoslavia put the German Armed Forces in a position to take more or less abundant booty, virtually everything that a unit working on government cryptographic systems had to worry about was gone. But the unit working on military systems obtained confirmation of their results.

Cryptanalytic high-water mark Autumn 1939/ autumn 1943

The work in my unit went on smoothly. Traffic came in in over-abundant measure and the analysts were instructed to process only important diplomatic messages. For with some 100 decrypted messages a day, sometimes several pages in length, their handling began to cause difficulty through the inevitable checks, the preliminary evaluation in Section b X and the final utilization by the experts (e. g., Foreign Armies West and East). Thus the work went on, taxing everybody's strength, to be sure, but as long as the analysts had their full night's rest there was no diminution of output.

Discharge On 6.6.1945 I was transferred to the Fuehrerreserve, arrived by troop transport on 19.6.1945 at Landshut in Bavaria, and on 21.6.1945 was dismissed to Straubing in Lower Bavaria, where I had a letter of recommendation from Landrat HARTENBACH (Kreis Malleredorf) since I was not a Party member. I became an automobile and bicycle mechanic.

Arrest On the evening of 2.7.1946 I was arrested ostensibly as a witness needed in Nuernberg and as a guest of the Military Government and was confined in the prison at Straubing until the morning of 19.8.1946. On the forenoon of 20.8.1946 I was turned in at Haus Alaska.[13]

Family On 11.1.1922 I married Frl Elise Sophie Katharine von BLANCKENSEE, daughter of former Royal Prussian Major General Peter von BLANCKENSEE, who died of his wounds, and his wife Elisabeth nee von WOLFF. On 28.1.1923 my son Siegwart Heinrich FENNER was born. He died as Lieutenant on the Staff of a unit of the Armored Division Gross-Deutschland on 19.2.1945 in the hospital train in consequence of a serious wound and was buried in Amberg, Bavaria. He was the only male child. On 24.7.1928 my daughter Else Frederick FENNER was born.

/s/ Wilhelm FENNER

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13. The Haus Alaska was the cover name given to the house on the grounds of the Hq 7707 European Command Intelligence Center at Oberursel, near Frankfurt, Germany where prisoners of high rank were detained. FENNER was held there (September-December 1946) for interrogation at the request of Army Security Agency. [Editor's note]